

School District of Hillsborough County • Superintendent's Evaluation 2012-2013

Standards/Indicators

Comments**

Standard I. Leadership and District Culture

<u>Olson</u>	The district has a well deserved reputation for educational progress. Ms. Elia needs to support staff and communicate throughout the community to maintain this progress.
<u>Stuart</u>	<p>As previously noted in the interim evaluation and my conversations with the superintendent, the district needs to implement a continuous improvement process with respect to PR and marketing. Students and parents are our number one customers and we must make it a priority that public education is the choice parents are making for their students. I am encouraged at the expansion of the PIO office and the hiring of a specific Department Manager, Strategic Initiative Communications and Marketing. This is definitely an area for the district to grow our PR and marketing in a positive manner, but at this time it is too early to rate the standard until results are realized and brought before the board.</p> <p>Specifically item #6 "promote and expect a climate of tolerance, acceptance and civility"</p> <p>This was an item that the Superintendent chose to "rebut" parent issues and/or complaints against the District from the Dias. This board member feels that this type behavior and action is not productive in moving the District forward. It is for this reason that I have moved the Superintendents score from Satisfactory to Conditional.</p>
<u>White</u>	Mrs. Elia continues to promote academic rigor and is more visible in the eastern Hillsborough community. She has a golden opportunity to revisit several key issues that have been addressed in an effort to show a true trend of continuous quality improvement.

Standard II. Policy and Governance

<u>Olson</u>	Ms. Elia works very effectively to buffer the district from negative impacts of state decisions. She and the board members have considerable work to do on interpersonal and working relationships.
<u>Stuart</u>	<p>While I believe that the Suspended Agenda being utilized by the board and staff has allowed for certain issues to be brought forward and updated for the public to hear, we still have much work to do in this area. While the superintendent does have a good working relationship with governing body of state officials, this board member feels that interpersonal and working relationships with the board members needs significant improvement.</p> <p>This board member would like to see the board set more district wide legislative priorities. Presently, we rely heavily on the Superintendent and the legislative chair to interpret our direction from our Strategic Plan. It would be helpful and give the board additional direction to set their own legislative priorities and be more proactive on the issues that are being presented in our state for consideration.</p> <p>Serious consideration needs to be given to methods on how to keep the informed of critical issues and needs within the district. The present method of emailing the board with every bus incident that occurs in a single day is cumbersome and ineffective. The current system is not accessible on mobile devices and we need to see this improved. We also need to be clear about what events and circumstances should come via email or via phone to board members.</p> <p>Specifically Item 15, "Accept responsibility for recommendations made"</p> <p>The current agenda item that has been presented to the board twice this month regarding the purchase of busses for our District. This item was not a clear or concise recommendation and</p>

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Standard II. Policy and Governance, cont'd

<u>Stuart</u> con't	to further muddy the situation staff presented an entirely different recommendation two weeks following with no explanation. The procurement process must be clear and must show conviction for the purchase. Board members should not be receiving information at the start of the meeting that is distinctly different than the original agenda item.
<u>White</u>	Mrs. Elia has done much better in this metric. I am pleased with the increased amount of information that the board is receiving. I am also receiving more verbal information from staff to keep me informed. She also seems to be doing a better job of following cues offered by the board during meetings. She has also been very receptive to personnel recommendations.

Standard III. Communications and Community Relations

<u>Olson</u>	Although the district enjoys a well-earned national reputation, we need better communication with parents, teachers and others in the community.
<u>Stuart</u>	Recent events have let this board member to question many of the items listed under this standard. Again, the hiring of new personal in strategic communications and marketing is a start to fully engage all of the participants that have involvement in schooling. But a workable and manageable method for effective communication with ALL board members from the superintendent and staff hinders the work of this board. Most recently, the proposal for the purchase of buses for this district was very poorly communicated to board members by staff. Initially the staff was very clear on their desires and the direction they wanted to move. Outside intervention from another bus company hindered that process and raised many valid questions that did not get addressed prior to the board meeting. This board member should not be expected to accept a significant change to an agenda item without explanation from staff. However we arrived at the discrepancy is not important, what is key is that the situation could have been avoided by all involved if the item was pulled from the agenda for further review and clarification. Ultimately, this was the desire of the board as reflected in their vote. This board member needs a procurement process that reflects items that enable us (the board) to make a cost benefit analysis as to which purchase to make.
<u>White</u>	My communication with the superintendent continues to be effective. She is doing a better job of vetting major issues with the board. Community involvement and public-private collaboration has been improved.

Standard IV. Organizational Management

<u>Olson</u>	Financial management is excellent, but communication – information – continues to be weak. Vision and planning are excellent.
<u>Stuart</u>	This board member feels that transparency to our stakeholders and the community at large is imperative. I have personally asked for more open communication and transparency with respect to the budget and we are not more than 1/2 way through the process for this school year and the same presentation style is being used for both the board and the public. The superintendent has been open to the board's direction to look for incentives for our employees, pay increases for our bus drivers and ESE aides. The superintendent has been open to ideas for how to better serve the students of this district and continue to meet the cost cutting measures enacted by our legislature.

Standard IV. Organizational Management, cont'd

<u>White</u>	I continue to praise Mrs. Elia for her swift reaction to issues within our ESE department. With respect to indicator #27, I still do not feel as though I am an adequate part of determining priorities for budgeting or that the board is given enough information on the budget. The superintendent should make budget priorities a part of one-on-one meetings with board members for her consideration.
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Standard V. Human Resource Management

<u>Olson</u>	Morale needs to be addressed to permit our progress to continue.
<u>Stuart</u>	The fair and impartial treatment of our employees is an area of concern. Due process for teachers and support personal is at times not equitable. An example of this would be the situation that arose at Pierce Middle School where this board member had to request that an additional investigation be started to make sure that all of the issues with that site were addressed. Some progress has been made in this area with the reorganization and the appointment of additional investigators to handle such matters.
<u>White</u>	Moral and management of the EET initiatives continue to be a topic of concern. I challenge Mrs. Elia to build up her staff, make it known that they are truly appreciated, and make them know that they are truly empowered. I hope to see more structured accountability mechanisms for senior staff.

Standard VI. Instructional Leadership

<u>Olson</u>	I would like to see Ms. Elia more engaged with parents, teachers and others in the area – truly hearing concerns.
<u>Stuart</u>	AP exam success is up again in our district however this board member would like to see a focus shift to technical and career studies and certifications. We have also added additional AP STEM courses but the general emphasis on AP is a continuous reevaluation of our goals for high achieving students. It would be an improvement to see the superintendent focus some of our AP efforts on the African American and Hispanic populations as we see little increase in those two student sub groups. (summation based on the superintendent's evaluation incentive report, Jan 2013)
<u>White</u>	The superintendent has the challenge of dealing with constantly changing state standards. I challenge her to truly empower her teachers as professionals – and principals as leaders – so as to have our students prepared to excel on any state metric.

Standard VII. Curriculum Planning Development

<u>Olson</u>	Stakeholders feel excluded.
<u>Stuart</u>	It is progressive to see the superintendent introducing additional STEM AP coursework for our students. It is also encouraging to see the continued relationship with our community colleges and dual enrollment including the two new programs at Leto High School and Armwood High School. More must be done in the area of middle school where if a student isn't being successful they may never make it to the 9 th grade. Like their high school peers, middle school students need options that lead them towards a certificate path if necessary.
<u>White</u>	I wish that teachers had more control and flexibility in choosing teaching methods and techniques.

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Standard VIII. Values and Ethics of Leadership

<u>Olson</u>	Ethics are unquestioned.
<u>Stuart</u>	#47 states "manifest a professional code of ethics and demonstrate personal integrity" #48 "model accepted moral and ethical standards in all interactions." In noting these two items this board member feels that the Superintendent and Attorney conversation that was caught on a live microphone was not only unacceptable, but the follow up to this embarrassing situation should have been a private and public apology, not a rebuttal to the board members in question. This type of action and behavior does not build trust between the board and Superintendent and Staff, it only widens the gap that has already been created. Defending the District against speakers at the podium is not good PR nor is it in good taste to try and call out parents of their actions or inactions. I am against this tactic as a way to try and solve the problems that come to this board and the Superintendent. We will always have critics and we will always have constituents, parents, and community members that will have negative comments to bring before the board. We are here to listen and that should be our message. We should always be willing to work with our critics not give them fuel for the fire.
<u>White</u>	I believe that Mrs. Elia is a moral and ethical person.

Standard IX. Labor Relations

<u>Olson</u>	Ongoing collaboration is imperative.
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AREAS OF STRENGTH

<u>Stuart</u>	The district is highly regarded as a leader in education in the state. Other districts look at Hillsborough County and wait to see what we will do before making key decisions. Our Superintendent is also highly regarded as a respected leader in Florida with a frank and focuses vision for her district. I am pleased with many of the initiatives that have been brought forward including the Bring Your Own Device, Lighthouse Guidance System, and Edsby. I am also pleased to see the district pushing forward with the wireless capacity at all schools over the next year.
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AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

<u>Stuart</u>	Communication with the board is always an area in which improvement can be made. This means open, honest, to the point communication. Communication also means communicating our message to the general public, students and families. We are moving in the direction by hiring some new PR related staff and redesign of the website, but we still need to make sure that our programs are accessible and that staff responds to requests. As I have said before, our student families are our customers and service needs to be top notch. We are in competition daily with other educational entities. Continued efforts to work with our ESE populations and staff for safe and suitable educational environments.
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GENERAL COMMENTS

<u>Edgecomb</u>	<p>As a school district, though we continue to operate in an era of increasing and changing accountability, great scrutiny and demands by parents and the community around numerous issues and the continuing decline in financial resources despite increased and complex mandates by both federal and state lawmakers, I appreciate your efforts to address these mounting issues. Although you have placed continuous emphasis on improving communications, internally and externally, and expand your efforts to show appreciation to our employees, there are still both highs and lows in employee morale. I know you are not oblivious to this concern because communication efforts have greatly improved and you continue to look for ways to share information with all stakeholders and reach out to them and I commend you for keeping this as a priority.</p> <p>We continue to lead in many areas through the state and nation and serve as a model for others to emulate. This is a tribute to your leadership, the leadership and work of your staff, the committed efforts of leaders in our schools and other sites, and the hard work and dedication of teachers and staffs in our schools and employees throughout the district. I hope that we can continue to focus on the important issues, minimum distractions and collaborate in ways that yield continuous improvement and success.</p> <p>In your interim evaluation, I indicated how critical it was for you to add the issue of the high suspension of African-American/Hispanic male students as a priority for discussion and intervention; and you have. I look forward, with keen interest in the implementation of the program and strategies during the upcoming school year and I hope that there will be ongoing updates citing both challenges and successes.</p> <p>ESE must continue to be among the significant issues addressed and that the efforts you have put in place will continue to meet the needs of our students and families.</p> <p>I have every confidence that as a district we can move forward, restore confidence where needed, and stay committed to providing a high quality education for our students while continuing to build relationships with our families and showing appreciation to and supporting our employees.</p>
<u>Griffin</u>	<p>MaryEllen, in writing this evaluation I reviewed my past performance evaluations of you. In doing so a common theme was evident. I have concluded that you still exhibit some of the same traits that I observed in 2006-2007. I will be citing specific examples throughout this evaluation, which will illustrate either a lack of growth on your part, or worse, a regression in some cases.</p> <p>I was trying to work towards a productive and professional relationship with you and tempered my tone and delivery after the first evaluation, but I am at a point where I can no longer whitewash my feedback to you. I have come to the conclusion that the work on our relationship has unfortunately turned out to be a one-sided effort.</p> <p>Following the death of Isabella Herrera, you failed to notify the board and the public of the tragedy and denied knowledge situation. There was no official investigation and report. This is unacceptable. The board was not made aware of this issue until a press conference was held,</p>

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GENERAL COMMENTS, cont'd

<u>Griffin, cont'd</u>	<p>at which point Jenny Caballero had also lost her life while in our care.</p> <p>Your subsequent handling of these two horrible tragedies was appalling and beyond conscience. These two tragedies where two children lost their lives and families were forever changed, was a turning point for me and made me see your leadership in a whole new light.</p> <p>These two tragedies (and several other major issues in the ESE department) set a whirlwind of events into action. You were slow to recognize the magnitude of the issues in ESE that were unfolding under your administration. Staff at the school where Jenny Caballero lost her life were either fired or demoted, yet you laterally transferred the head of ESE, Joyce Weiland into a position, I had previously been told was not going to be filled. This only succeeded in making the employees at the school sites, who deal with our students on a daily basis, feel like they are held to a different standard of accountability than staff who is promoted to administration downtown.</p> <p>The way you addressed the concerns regarding the issues in ESE from parents, the community, and the board was abysmal. Although we have finally begun to address the issues identified by the various individuals and committees, the perception of a cover up by district personnel has created a major issue of trust from the public. You fail to recognize this as an issue you need to address. Instead you have a tendency to vilify and discredit anyone you perceive as a threat. You fail to recognize that you would not be the superintendent of the Hillsborough County School District if it were not for the students and the public that funds this district.</p> <p>Over the years I have brought many issues to you describing employee's low morale, as have other board members. Your lack of regard for this important feedback offered by me, other board members, and the public illustrates a lack of empathy for the employees in the trenches. Your unwillingness to address these ongoing concerns has resulted in a serious morale problem, from teachers to support personnel. This morale problem is growing increasingly worse with each passing day. The fact that employees are afraid to speak about their concerns in an open dialogue continues to be a major concern.</p> <p>Compounding this problem is your leadership style, which is oppressive, autocratic, and unyielding. I stated in my first evaluation in 2006-2007 "while MaryEllen strives towards educational excellence, it is my belief that she falls short in doing so in a collaborative or empowering manner. MaryEllen needs to recognize that leadership is a process of creating shared vision, securing buy-in to the vision, and motivating (not forcing) others to take action on that vision. In today's collaborative and transparent workplace, leadership cannot be autocratic." Educators have been inundated with external stressors for a number of years. The last thing we need is an iron fisted administration that only adds to those stressors.</p> <p>I have also shared concerns with you in one-on-one private meetings and at board meetings that I have heard from employees who have been told by their supervisors not to talk to board members or give board members information they have requested. These employees are</p>
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GENERAL COMMENTS, cont'd

<u>Griffin cont'd</u>	<p>unwilling come forward out of fear of retaliation. You have not worked to resolve this issue and it continues to be an ongoing problem.</p> <p>As I have stated to you in the past, you are spending too much time and energy trying to control the board and the public and not enough time getting your staff to do the right thing and be more accurate in the recommendations you are making to the board for a vote. I will not belabor the recent open microphone situation; however I need to use this situation as an example of the lack of the regard for the public and the board that represents the public.</p> <p>A recent example of the recommendations you and your staff have made to the board that was problematic was the recent bus fiasco. Due to the fact that the agenda item was fraught with error, I attempted, to no avail, to have the agenda item pulled off the agenda to allow staff-time to correct the errors. The board ultimately tabled the item due to the errors. This could have been avoided. It is unfortunate that your talents are being wasted on your fight against anyone who disagrees with you.</p> <p>Over the past few years I have defended you publicly, citing the district's financial position in comparison to other districts in the state and nation. I stand by those words, however; as we begin the recovery, based on my past experience with you, I don't have confidence in your ability to adapt your autocratic and intimidating leadership style to lead this district forward.</p> <p>This leadership style is filtering down and permeating the district culture. I am continually approached by employees who are fearful of retaliation from your administration. Many employees are browbeaten and are just trying to "fly below the radar" and just do what is right for kids. You tell me you want to know who these employees are and I can't tell you because they are afraid. You have not realistically addressed this issue and it is getting worse. You have addressed other anonymous complaints against teachers, but not your administrative staff.</p> <p>In the 2006-2007 evaluation I stated "There have been times concerning very divisive issues where MaryEllen did not effectively collaborate or communicate to the School Board. I do not see where MaryEllen recognizes or respects that she is accountable to the board and the board is accountable to the public. Her uncompromising approach fosters a perception of a superintendent who feels her agenda comes before the board's priorities."</p> <p>An example of a high profile and divisive issue mentioned in the aforementioned statement is your security recommendation where you held a press conference announcing your plan before you consulted with the board. I said then and I will say again, that was a policy decision that needed to be made by the board.</p>
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GENERAL COMMENTS, cont'd

<u>Griffin, cont'd</u>	<p>In my 2006-2007 evaluation I stated "The School Board has "...any power except as expressly prohibited by law..." (F.S. 1001.32 (2)) and may adopt <i>policy and/or procedure</i> (F.S. 1001.43 (10)) while the superintendents powers are either to advise or recommend to the Board (1001.49 (2), 1001.49 (3), 1001.49 (4), 1001.49 (5)) while providing "general oversight" of District operations in order to identify problems so that the Superintendent may make additional recommendations as needed (1001.49 (1)). F.S. 1001.51 in describing the Superintendent's duties continues the trend of not providing discretionary decision making authority, instead vesting the Superintendent's power and influence in her ability to advise and sway the Board...Based on numerous conversations and "events" I do not believe that MaryEllen shares this interpretation of Florida School Law. I find this most troubling as I believe that this misalignment is the source of many of the challenges that I have cited in this Performance Evaluation."</p> <p>This example from my 2006-2007 evaluation is another example of the lack of growth and one of the systemic problems you face as the superintendent.</p>
<u>Olson</u>	<p>The district deserves the national attention it is receiving for efforts to help teachers reach more students more effectively. Those successes are due to the superintendent as well as district staff and, most importantly, our teachers. Now it is time to help this community understand what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we are succeeding. We owe that to our teachers, students, and community.</p>
<u>Valdes</u>	<p>This is an unsatisfactory evaluation. Besides the barriers I wrote about in your Interim Evaluation, you clearly do not understand your position or even who employs you. Your actions do not demonstrate an understanding and celebrating of community cultures. You do not demonstrate a climate of tolerance, acceptance and civility. You do however, in an intimidating manner, impose your authority to promote your agenda.</p> <p>The absence of clear procedures impedes employees to clearly understand this intent of the policies and how they are to be carried out consistently. This has been an ongoing problem for quite some time.</p> <p>Going back to the fiasco of the "Black Girls Speak" contract to the Urban Teaching Academy and how the Board was misguided as to the expectations of the contract and using USF as a donor to fulfill this commitment, who then states there was no such commitment promised to the Board, wasn't acceptable.</p> <p>You politicized the security situation about the use of \$4 million dollars while having made your plea to the public rather than coming to the Board for a discussion and approval.</p> <p>Schools are not equitable in technology. The budget is not transparent at either level, but yet you pulled us through a financial difficulty.</p> <p>Most recently the bus purchase contract fiasco. You're unable to provide to the Board a clear agenda item specifying the rational for such an expenditure.</p>

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GENERAL COMMENTS, cont'd

<u>Valdes cont'd</u>	<p>In the three (3) District 1 high schools there are ninety-three (93) students who appeared to have graduated but in actuality received a Certificate of Completion in which these students are unable to pursue any other options for their future. You have not been held accountable for this due to the lack of transparency in this area.</p> <p>The fact there are pending litigation pertaining to previous employees as well as student fatalities and injuries is clearly not a good sign of leadership. The deaths of Isabella Herrera and Jenny Caballero will continue to be an issue because you haven't been held accountable for those incidents. Your lack of communication to the Board regarding Isabella Herrera's death was and still is very unethical.</p> <p>You have been unable to recruit either in the instructional or in the non-instructional side a diverse staff, particularly Hispanics, in leadership positions despite of all the reorganization charts I have supported.</p> <p>Finally, the open microphone situation did you no favors. Your actions are a direct disrespect to the public; the people of this county who, we, the Board represent. Due to these concerns that are not new, I have no confidence in your ability to manage the eighth largest school district in the nation and get this district to greatness.</p>
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*Note: **Comments have been reproduced precisely as provided by each board member.*

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